FREE GUIDE

Tax Prep Checklist for Freelancers & Small Business

Everything to hand your CPA — organized by document type and deadline.

A well-organized tax package lowers your CPA's bill, reduces errors, and gets your return filed on time. Use this guide alongside our free Tax Prep Checklist workbook and Tax Deadline Calendar.

Start with clean books

- Reconcile every bank, credit card, and loan account through December 31.
- Categorize every transaction — no 'uncategorized' or 'ask my accountant' balances.
- Run a year-end P&L, balance sheet, and general ledger.
- Separate any personal expenses paid from business accounts (record as owner draws).

Income documents

- Forms 1099-NEC and 1099-MISC received from clients
- Form 1099-K from payment processors and online marketplaces
- Sales reports and bank deposit records for all 12 months
- 1099-INT / 1099-DIV for business accounts
- Records of any grants, rebates, or cancelled debt

WATCH FOR 1099s you receive won't always match your books (timing, processor fees, refunds). Reconcile the difference before your CPA asks.

Expense documentation

Category	What to provide	Notes
Vehicle	Mileage log (date, miles, purpose) or actual costs	2026 IRS standard rate: 72.5¢ per business mile
Home office	Square footage of office and home; rent/mortgage interest, utilities, insurance	Space must be used regularly and exclusively for business
Meals	Receipts with who attended and business purpose	Generally 50% deductible
Travel	Airfare, lodging, and itinerary showing business purpose	Keep personal days separate
Equipment	Invoices with date placed in service	May qualify for Section 179 or bonus depreciation
Retirement	SEP, SIMPLE, or 401(k) contribution records	Some contributions can be made after year-end

Category	What to provide	Notes
Health insurance	Premium statements (self-employed)	Rules depend on entity type

Payroll and contractors

- W-2s, W-3, and four quarterly Form 941s plus Form 940
- Forms 1099-NEC issued to contractors (due January 31)
- W-9s for every contractor
- State payroll filings (in California, DE 9 and DE 9C)

Estimated taxes and prior returns

- Dates and amounts of all federal and state estimated payments
- Prior-year federal and state returns
- Any IRS or state notices received during the year

Key federal deadlines (calendar-year businesses)

Date*	What's due
January 15	Q4 estimated tax payment (individuals)
January 31	W-2s to employees and SSA; 1099-NECs to contractors and IRS; Q4 Form 941
March 15	Partnership (1065) and S corporation (1120-S) returns or extensions
April 15	Individual (1040) and C corporation (1120) returns or extensions; Q1 estimated tax
June 15	Q2 estimated tax
September 15	Q3 estimated tax; extended partnership and S corp returns
October 15	Extended individual and C corporation returns

**If a date falls on a weekend or legal holiday, it moves to the next business day. California has its own estimated-tax schedule (30% April, 40% June, 0% September, 30% January for individuals) — see our Tax Deadline Calendar.*

Organize the hand-off

1. Create one folder per tax year with subfolders: Income, Expenses, Assets, Payroll, Estimates, Prior Returns.
2. Name files clearly (e.g., 2026_1099-K_Stripe.pdf).
3. Include a one-page summary of anything unusual: new loans, asset sales, ownership changes, big purchases.
4. Send everything at once, as early as possible — ideally by mid-February.

REMEMBER Can't get everything by the deadline? An extension extends the time to file, not the time to pay. Estimate and pay what you owe by the original due date.

This guide is general information for small business owners and is not tax, legal, or accounting advice. Rules, rates, and deadlines change — confirm specifics with your CPA or the relevant agency.